

## Ephesians 5:3-20

### Key verse:

“8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light”

I remember when I was first promoted to being a manager at work. I was quite excited. I finally got my own business card with my name and my new title, I got to change my email footer from planner to Planning Manager and I straight away updated my resume. But with that change of job title came a new job description. I no longer could just focus on my own work, as a manager I had to ensure my entire teams work was ok. Instead of coming to work at my usual time on a Tuesday, I had to come to work earlier to participate in a managers meeting. I had the title, so I was a manager, but I now needed to act like a manager. Getting the title of manager wasn't the end of a career journey for me, it was the beginning.

It's the same with the key verse in todays passage. We see it in verse 8, “8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light”. Paul tells the Ephesians that they should live as Children of Light. To preface that he doesn't say “to become children of light, live as children of light. No, he says you are light so live as light. It's both challenging and comforting isn't it. It's comforting because we know that we have been changed, we have moved from Darkness to Light. It's not you are light and darkness or try to be light, it is you are light. The reason Paul can say this is because because of what Jesus has done for us. Just like my boss promoted me to manager so that I was a manager even before I acted like one, we are now called light because Jesus has made us that way. But also, just like getting the title, planning manager, was the start of the new career journey for me. Becoming a Christian, becoming light is the start of the journey for us. We now need to live as children of the light. And that's what we are going to look at for the rest of the talk today.

We are going to look at What does living as children of the light look like?, Why we should live as children of light? And finally How do we live as children of light?

### **What does living as children of light look like?**

Like last weeks passage, this one contains a number of checklists that point to what children of light look like or don't look like. In verse 3 it says that "there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" Verse 5 repeats the list and adds that they are idolaters. Then in verse 4. "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."

Now we could delve into each of these behaviours and spend a whole sermon on each one teasing out what it looks like and what those specific actions mean. Sexual immorality and greed are some of the big issues that we tend to focus on in our talks. So, this morning/evening rather than go over them again in detail I plan not to focus on these points so much as I want to focus more on why and how we can live this way, and so I'll only Briefly mention a little summary of what these things mean. So....

Sexual immorality. If you take the overall picture and definition from the bible. Sexual immorality is sex outside of marriage between a husband and wife. This means a lot of things are sexually immoral from the bibles point of view. Now I think we often look at what others do to point out examples of sexual immorality. Instead we need to look at our own lives. Remember we shouldn't be showing even a hint of sexual immorality. This is what Jesus is referring to when he says that whoever looks at a woman or man lustfully commits adultery. So we should make sure we are self examining rather than first pointing to others faults.

Another action Paul mentions is Greed, Greed is a sin that while mentioned frequently throughout the old and new testament we seem to talk less about. Partly I think that's because Greed is a sin of the heart where the same action may be sinful for one person and not for another.

The key here is the line afterwards which helps define what Greed is.. Greed is idolatry. Greed is relying on wealth and possessions, not God.

Having gone through what would be perceived as big issues, it almost seems the last area is minor in comparison. If you could only list 3 actions that you wanted to challenge Christians with what would you choose? Sexual immorality, greed and lying, murder, stealing?? Paul here doesn't choose any of those instead he chooses to include the way we speak as part of what it means to live as Gods holy people. Telling dirty jokes or commenting in a sexual way about people makes light of sexual immorality. And by speaking about it or making light of sexual immorality it can make it easier to succumb as we normalise the actions first through words.

Paul mentions these three particular actions because he knows many people struggle with them but he is not just limiting us to these. Paul also indicates we should be aiming high with all areas of our life by saying we should avoid Impurity in general and in verse 11 telling us to have Nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.

Paul doesn't just use negative language to describe what makes a child of light he also mentions 3 positive things. We see them in verse 9, goodness, righteousness and truth. It's an interesting and challenging list of 3 positive actions. To do all 3 is hard, its not just doing good, you need to tell the truth as you do it and its not even doing good truthfully, the true measure of being a child of light is also righteousness. This is The idea of behaving the right way before God.

Goodness in this context is seen as being generous to others, kind to others, its regarded as the opposite of Greed. Righteousness is seen as upright behaviour and the opposite of sexual immorality and truthfulness contrasts with using inappropriate language.

Given these negative and positive lists of behaviours, it can seem quite hard cant it. Perhaps even impossible. It is very counter cultural. Greed and language aren't often seen as bad by society as how we see them and what Christians call sexual immorality is often seen in a positive light

by society and can even see us being mocked or criticized for our view. So why should we push ourselves to live like this? Why should we live as children of light?

### **Why live as children of light?**

Paul definitely addresses this in this passage. He actually gives 3 different reasons why we should live as children of light. The first is somewhat simple. Because that's who we are. Remember the first verse we looked at "8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light". Also in verses 3 and 4. Paul tells us that to not live as children of light is Improper for God's holy people and those actions are Out of place for us.

Its like when I got promoted to manager. As part of being a manager my actions were now expected to be different. It would be improper for me to say to one of the people that reported to me who came looking for help with work to say that its not my responsibility and then just do my own work. As part of being a manager it is proper for me to manage and help my staff. And for a Christian it is proper for us to live good, truthful and righteous lives and it is out of place for us to be sexually immoral, greedy or use inappropriate language.

Another way Paul encourages us to live as Children of Light is by telling us the consequences of not being Children of light. In verse 5 & 6 he says that people who live like people of darkness have No inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ and that God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Very few people, I think, sometimes including Christians take judgment seriously. For most people they think that if there is an afterlife, they will go to the heaven version of it, because I'm generally a good person. It seems like Judgement has no place, and if it does its reserved for murderers or evil dictators. Looking at the bible this is clearly not true. Now, We do not need a return to "brimstone" preaching, but we do need to make sure we do include judgment as part of the Christian message no matter how unpopular it is. The way that Paul speaks about judgement shows us how to do this well. You see, Paul takes judgment seriously, but always in balance and without being

overly descriptive. He doesn't use scare tactics, but the threat of judgment is clearly there. The nice message that most want to believe that says Everyone can go to heaven is an attractive idea, but it is a lie. If there is no judgment, no one needs to be saved. If God does not respond with wrath to this rebellious world, he is not much of a God. He who does not get angry does not care. God cares, and judgment is real.

Paul also encourages the Ephesians to live as children of light by saying what being light can do to others.

It's worth noting that although Paul has said have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness he also says that we should expose the darkness. You see Paul doesn't want us to avoid non-Christians. Rather, he wants us to be light and do our job of exposing darkness while avoiding being caught up in what the darkness does.

In 11-13 Paul says that the light will expose the darkness. Now that might sound like that we should go around pointing out other people's problems. Christians do have the responsibility to expose the darkness. But it's interesting that Paul doesn't preface, expose them, by saying point out their sin, no he says live as children of light. By both the way we live and conversation we have we can be a light shining in the darkness. Exposing here is the visible contrast of how we should live compared to others.

So how can we show distinction without also displaying a holier-than-thou attitude? How can we avoid participating in sin without being judgmental? How can we avoid being destructive when we confront? The answers are in the question. Being holier-than-thou and judgmental are definitely things we Christians do sometimes but they are neither necessary nor acceptable. The solution has already been shown earlier in Ephesians. Paul's first instructions in the second half of Ephesians which we looked at a few weeks ago is the instruction for us to be humble, gentle, patient and loving. If we exercise these qualities, negative results can be reduced. We can refuse to be involved in wrong practices and still care deeply for the people doing them. We can speak

the truth in love even when confronting and rejecting disobedience to God.

And the reward for being a child of light and for exposing darkness, is that they too can become light. Verse 13 says “But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.” Verse 14 explains how. Christ, that is Jesus shines on people to wake them from death, to save them from darkness. Just like we are children of light in the Lord, so to once Christ shines on others they too can be light, they too can be saved.

I’ve seen examples of this at Ministry of Game. At Ministry of Game when we play games we say that we want people to be able to play games in a safe and friendly environment. You may think well, of course. But a lot of the people that come say that is not what you find at a lot of gaming groups. A lot of them can be confrontational and discriminatory. At Ministry of Game we say that part of our ethic is to be welcoming and accepting and we point out unacceptable behaviour. This has caused some of the non-Christians to associate the reason for the difference with our faith. But it is still hard. It’s hard to always know the right actions to model or how to balance welcoming and acceptance with identifying unacceptable behaviour.

### **How do we live as children of light?**

That brings me to my final point. How do we live as children of light? How do we know what is right if we don’t get a full list of dos and do nots. How do we know how to expose darkness? How does a bible that is more than 2000 years old help us today. Well I think Paul realises that he cant give a complete set of commands for everyone, everywhere for all time. That is why he addressed some things that are timeless like sexual immorality, greed and language. But its also why he says that we need to be wise and not unwise and that we need to seek to understand the Lords Will. How do we be wise? How do we understand God’s will? By reading God’s word. By allocating time to think through it. How much time in a week are you spending studying God’s word? Are you only spending time in God’s word on Sunday when you come to church? Or

maybe once at Bible Study during the week and then on Sunday? I would encourage you to allocate more time than that. There are lots of ways to do it. You can get good audio books so that you can listen while you drive or walk to work. If you want to read the whole bible in a year, It only takes about 10-15 min a day. Or if you want more guidance with your bible readings you can get free daily devotionals from websites like Our daily bread who will email you or even send you a print devotional that will take about 10 min, it's free and they even have it to read or listen in many languages, like Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil and many more. The website is [odb.org](http://odb.org) I encourage all of us to spend 10-15 min a day to further understand God's will, so that we know how to live as children of light and can help bring others out of darkness into light as well.

The other guidance Paul gives to live as children of light is quite simple. It's to give thanks. We see it verse 4 and in verse 20. always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. How would giving thanks help us live as children of light? Because when you are thankful it is hard to also be greedy. When you are thankful it is easier not to be sexually immoral. You see what greed and sexual immorality have in common is that they both show a desire for more than we have. Whether it is material goods or pleasure through inappropriate sex. But if we are thankful, it means there is a level of contentment. Recognition that what God has given us is good and acknowledging that through thanks means it is harder to fall into the other actions. How often do you show thanks to God?

I know growing up my family prayed with every meal and part of that prayer was thanks. You may wonder what giving thanks for food has to do with sexual immorality. Well, I think because food is a regular thing in our lives its a great way for us to get in the habit of being thankful. Being thankful for little things helps us get into the habit to be thankful to God for everything. So a challenge for you this week is before or after each meal you eat is to give Thanks to God for your food and one other thing in your life.

Finally in answer to the questions How to be children of light? I come back again to the opening verse that I read. "8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" As we read these challenging verses, we need to remember that perfect fulfillment of the lists here from Paul are not a prerequisite to becoming a christian or staying a christian. If we are christians we are light because Jesus has saved us. We have the freedom to challenge ourselves. TO some extent it would be easier to avoid darkness altogether and just be lights together, to shut ourselves off from the world but instead we are told that we should bring our light into the darkness, that we should be in the world. That is scary, that can lead to mistakes as we often pick up the habits of those around us. But we can have confidence in doing it because we know we are saved and if we make a mistake we can ask God for forgiveness.

So as we go out into our week remember the challenges from the talk.

Learn God's will more than just at church on Sunday or once a week at bible study. Spend 15 min a day and Pick up a devotional or read the bible throughout the week so that we can become wise and know God' will. Then we will better know how to act as children of light. It will help us know how to best expose the darkness and bring other people to join us in the light.

And second remember to be thankful to God for everything. Try and give thanks at each meal you have this week for your food and at least one other thing.

"8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light"

Amen